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PREFACE

This book attempts to contribute to our understanding of Mossi society, about which relatively little is known even within the continent of Africa. Many of the data were collected in the Upper Volta Republic between November 1955 and January 1957, a period when the Voltaics were preparing for important political changes. I did most of my field work in the area formerly included within the kingdom of Ouagadougou. I stayed only one week in the Yatenga and paid but brief visits to Tenkodogo and the Boussouma region. Thus, my basic data hold chiefly for Ouagadougou. My methods of research were the conventional anthropological ones: I recorded local oral histories, conducted personal interviews, attended court and important rituals, participated in the life of the people whenever possible, and collected genealogical and biographical data.

In addition, I read all the important documents I could find on the political history of the Mossi people in the files of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, in local administrative offices, and in the Archives of the Governor General of French West Africa in Dakar, Senegal. I also read published works on the Mossi by such scholars as Maurice Delafosse, A. A. Dim Delobson, Georges Cheron, Eugene Mangin, Lucien Marc, and Louis Tauxier. Their works were invaluable to me, and I owe them a debt of gratitude. My hope is that what I have added to the store of knowledge about the Mossi may be of service to Mossi scholars, whose studies will ultimately bring to light aspects of their own culture that we have missed.

The ethnographer working in contemporary Africa is faced with the problem of the time dimension. In reporting his findings, he may use the "ethnographic present" and describe the cultural system he studied as though all elements, even those dredged up from the memories of old men, were still viable in the society. Or he may use the past tense and thus underscore the fact that the society is changing, even though cultural traits from the past may be present and viable. I have elected the latter course primarily

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M. Frederic Guiernya en-
couraged me to prepare this work for publication, and M. Albert Salfo Balima not only read a draft of the manuscript, but kindly made available to me his own notes on Mossi society. Other Mossi and Voltaics, far too numerous to mention, gave freely of their time and friendship. 128 127

I am indebted to M. Le Moal, Director of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire at Ouagadougou, and to his assistant, M. Savonnet, for their hospitality. MM. Pujol and Mathieu, the French administrators in charge of the Mossi areas where I conducted my field work, were especially courteous and helpful. By introducing me to other administrators, they made it possible for me to visit other areas of Mossi country. [122]

I should like to thank Mrs. Doby Gilletti and Dr. Shirley Gorenstein for their helpful criticism of parts of this manuscript, and the Service Information Haute-Volta for permission to use the photographs that appear between pp. 178 and 179. I am also deeply indebted to Miss Ariane Brunel for her editorial assistance. Finally, I should like to praise my wife, Thelma, and my children for their forbearance during the many months of absences and neglect while I conducted this research and wrote up the results. Their support contributed greatly to my work. [128] [127]

E. P. S.